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20 July 1964



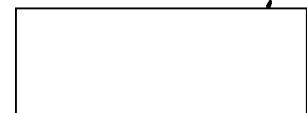
THE HIGHER MILITARY COUNCIL OF THE USSR

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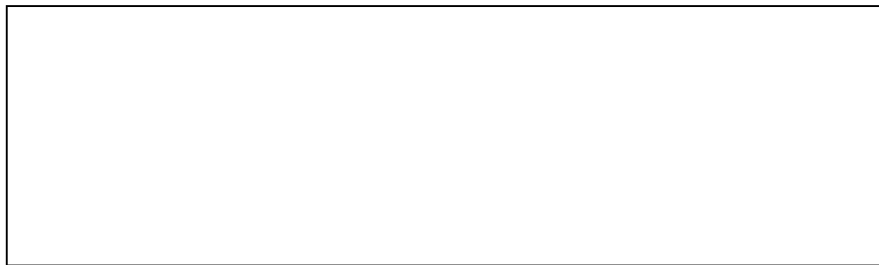
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THE HIGHER MILITARY COUNCIL OF THE USSR

This is a working paper, the first in a planned series of reports on Soviet military policy-making.



We examine here the Higher Military Council and offer tentative conclusions about the use of this institution by Khrushchev and the military for their various purposes.

A second study on military decision-making will discuss the roles of individual presidium members and leading party, government and military personnel in the policy-making process. A third study will reexamine the role of the military's main planning institution, the General Staff.

Although this paper has not been coordinated with other offices, the author has benefited much from discussion of the topic with colleagues in other offices of the Agency. The author alone is responsible for the paper's conclusions.



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THE HIGHER MILITARY COUNCIL OF THE USSR

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## THE HIGHER MILITARY COUNCIL OF THE USSR

### Summary and Conclusions

The highest-level body formally charged with providing defense recommendations to the decision-making authority in the Soviet Union is called the "Higher Military Council" (Vysshyy Voyenny Sovet\*). This body is shrouded in secrecy and is rarely mentioned in unclassified Soviet writings. However, by examining the occasional unclassified references to military decision-making [redacted]

[redacted] we have been able to illuminate the following features of the Higher Military Council:

(1) it is an institution created and used by Khrushchev to maintain direct operational and administrative control over the entire Soviet military establishment;

(2) it provides the professional military, who are not represented in the ruling party presidium, with direct access to Khrushchev and his "inner-presidium" military team, and, hence, an opportunity to influence decisions at an early stage in the policy-making process;

(3) it is primarily a consultative body, which deals with a wide range of strategic and administrative questions, but apparently has some decision-making authority (for example, "requirements" of an unknown kind are issued in the name of the Council);

\*The Higher Military Council--"Vysshyy Voyenny Sovet"--

[redacted] Soviet military dictionaries generally give two English meanings for "vysshyy;" the preferred one-- and the one used in this study--is "higher," and the second meaning is "supreme." [redacted]

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(4) Khrushchev is not bound to act on the recommendations of the military members of the Council (some of whom reportedly opposed his 1960 troop cut plan), but on some matters he has reportedly followed the military's advice or yielded to their pressure (e.g., the 1961 resumption of nuclear testing);

(5) the composition and function of the Council suggests that it is one device used by Khrushchev to bypass the ruling party presidium as a whole on certain military-political matters. Khrushchev himself convokes the Council, serves as its chairman, and dominates it. Depending on the matter at hand, participants in Council meetings have included presidium members who appear to be Khrushchev's principal military advisors (Brezhnev, Mikoyan, and Kozlov are the only ones specifically identified in reports on Council meetings), the principal Soviet military figures (Malinovsky, his deputies, and other senior military officers and advisors) and high-level party and government individuals involved in defense-related matters;

(6) the Council's high-powered membership and lofty position in the Soviet hierarchical scheme--the Council stands outside and above the Defense Ministry--make it a unique institution in the Soviet system today;

(7) nevertheless, the Council has antecedents in the Soviet past, and bears some functional similarity (but remains distinct in both usage and composition) to the National Security Council of the United States.

Stalin, too, established institutions like the Higher Military Council to ensure his dominance in the realm of decision-making and policy execution. Stalin's retention of the military policy prerogative in the post war years, however, did not depend upon the maintenance of an active and powerful council system, which he gradually curtailed. Khrushchev, after Marshal Zhukov's fall, revitalized the entire council system and formed the Higher Military Council to ensure for himself the powers which Stalin had wielded in the military sphere. But, unlike Stalin's institutions, Khrushchev's council system is more than a repressive device to retain personal dominance

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over the military; it provides the professional soldier with a high-level lobbying forum to recommend policy relating to the complex questions of modern war to the presidium decision-makers.

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## PART ONE: THE COUNCIL TODAY

### Introduction

It has been characteristic of Khrushchev's style of rule, since he took firm hold of the helm of state in 1957, to place himself at the head of the major party and government departments while methodically dividing responsibilities among his associates in order to prevent any of them from acquiring enough power--or a bureaucratic basis for achieving power--to rival his. Not content with his direct, personal control over the professional party apparatus, the USSR Council of Ministers, and the important RSFSR Buro, Khrushchev also assumed personal control over the military. It is not surprising then that his voice is the dominant one on military questions in the ruling presidium, and, with rare exceptions, the only party voice heard on that subject outside the Kremlin walls. The most important developments in military doctrine and advanced weapons in recent years have been attributed to his personal initiative.

To assure himself of a dominant role in the military decision-making process, Khrushchev assumed two key military posts which had antecedents in Stalin's time but which were created anew in a form more suitable to Khrushchev's particular circumstances and style of rule. Sometime after his showdown with Marshal Zhukov, probably in 1958, Khrushchev established (by a secret party decree, we think) a so-called Higher Military Council, consisting of key military and party personnel, to serve as his personal advisory group on matters relating to defense. Two or three years later, evidently, he also donned the lofty title of Supreme High Commander. This latter office combined, in effect, the highest political and military authority and gave Khrushchev personally powers and stature comparable to those of the President of the United States, or to those enjoyed by Stalin during the Second World War.

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By virtue of his position of Supreme High Commander, Khrushchev gained ultimate operational control over the Strategic Rocket Forces, and, presumably, the power to react to or initiate a nuclear strike without the prior approval of the other party leaders.\* And by virtue of his position of Chairman of the Higher Military Council Khrushchev may bypass the Presidium as a whole from the first stages of presumably any military-political venture.

We do not know whether Khrushchev considers himself fully capable of making "final" military decisions without prior consultation with leading party and military figures. We do know that he actively seeks out the advice of others--presidium colleagues, government specialists and military professionals in the process of policy formulation. The principal advisory forum is the Higher Military Council. But the Council, as we shall demonstrate, transcends its advisory role and assumes some executive and decision-making powers in its own right. Moreover, while Khrushchev uses the Council as an instrument for exercising his personal control over the military, the same organ provides the military with an opportunity to bring pressure (by force of argumentation) directly to bear on the party leadership for purposes of influencing policy decisions.

#### Hierarchical Status:

The Higher Military Council, as distinct from its predecessor institution with a similar name or other

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\*For a study on the streamlining of the strategic command machinery in peacetime, see CAESAR XVI of 3 July 1962, "Soviet Strategic Doctrine for the Start of War," pp. 35-39. Recently, Marshal Malinovsky, noting Khrushchev's exclusive control of the SRF, stated in RED STAR on 17 April 1964 that "on his initiative, and under his direct leadership, a new type of armed force--the strategic rocket troops--was created." (Our emphasis.)

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military councils, is not an organic part of the Soviet defense establishment. At least since 1958, when it was probably re-established and tailored to suit Khrushchev's purposes, the Council has stood outside and above the Ministry of Defense. The Council is, literally, the meeting place of the supreme political and military leaderships. It seems to be neither a primarily governmental body nor a party body, but a mixed one.



[redacted] remarked in one report that the Council is "attached to" (Russian not available) the Ministry of Defense. This cryptic statement may leave the impression in the minds of some readers that the Council is a "part of" the Ministry of Defense. We reject any such interpretation of the remark and cite as evidence of the subordination of the military establishment to the Higher Military Council [redacted] own descriptions of the Council's membership and activities, the latter often transcending the competence of the officer corps.

\*The pertinent quotation reads as follows: "The efforts of the commanding officer and party and Komsomol organizations must be directed toward the maintenance of a firm procedure, according to regulations, for the strict fulfillment of the requirements of the Central Committee of the CPSU, of the Main Military Council, of the Minister of Defense of the USSR and of the Commander-in-Chief of Missile Troops for a radical improvement in military discipline." (Our emphasis.)

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### Membership

The extraordinary position of the Council can be explained by (and, indeed, may stem from) its high-powered membership.

[redacted] described the Council as an "operational" and "very flexible" group of high-level party, government, and military officials under the jurisdiction of Commander-in-Chief Khrushchev. In addition to Khrushchev, who chairs the meetings of the Council, the only civilian members [redacted]

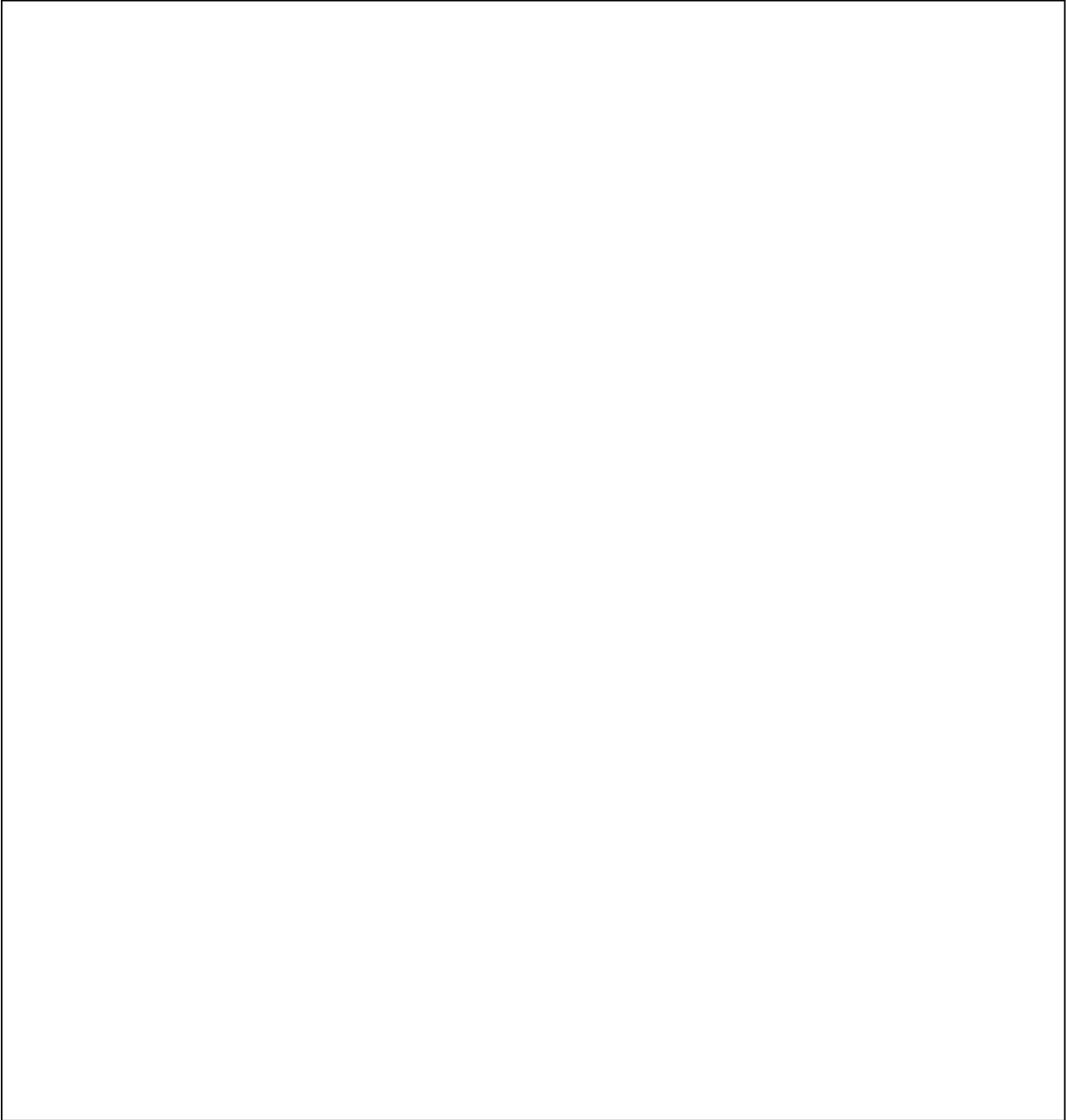
[redacted] were Mikoyan and Kozlov. [redacted] related that other presidium members attend meetings of the Council, [redacted] did not disclose their names. In addition, [redacted] depending on the matter at hand, members of the central committee, representatives from the State Committees for Electronics or Defense Technology, or scientists from the Academy of Sciences may be summoned to attend Council meetings.

On the military side, according to [redacted] all commanders-in-chief of the various branches of service are automatically members of the Council, and the Council may have an attached advisory group consisting of other high-ranking military advisors.\* In addition,

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depending upon the question under discussion, other combat commanders and senior military officers may be asked to attend the meetings.



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he expressed the view that Khrushchev's political power was such that he could be a member or head of any committee, council, or other official body, at any time.

#### Procedure

The Council, as explained [redacted] is entirely under Khrushchev's domination and functions at his discretion. The Council holds regularly scheduled meetings but also meets frequently whenever the need arises--a statement consistent with a 1958 military dictionary's definition of "Military Council" as a "permanent, or temporarily convoked consultative organ attached to the supreme state authority." Council sessions do not require the assembling of a quorum. All that is necessary for a session of the Council is for Khrushchev to meet with several of his advisors on military questions. (We do not know whether a meeting of the Council could be held in the absence of its chairman, Khrushchev.)

We have no information as to whether or not the members of the Council have voting rights, to the extent that decisions are made at meetings of the Council or in its name.\* The flexible and variegated membership of the Council, and the manner in which its meetings are reportedly conducted, suggest that the members do not cast a formal vote but seek to persuade a single arbiter, Khrushchev, by force of argumentation.

From the little evidence at our disposal, it would seem that the breadth of defense-related questions taken up at meetings of the Council is considerable. The 1958 dictionary of military terms cited earlier stated that

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\*Members of command level military councils do have voting rights. Decisions at this level, however, primarily concern day-to-day administrative chores.

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the Council was an organ "for the consideration of important problems concerning the preparation for and waging of war and military measures." [redacted]

[redacted]  
promotions and changes in top command positions in the armed forces; foreign policy--notably the German question; military strategy; and the structure and size of Soviet forces. The range of permissible questions is probably limited only by Khrushchev's interests.

#### Decision-Making Role

Although it is fundamentally a consultative body at the disposal of the supreme leadership, the Council also performs more direct functions in the policy-making process. For instance, some of the reports on the activities of the Council suggest that Khrushchev occasionally uses it as a forum for the announcement of his personal decisions--such as changes in the military high command--or for the preliminary airing of proposals, prior to presenting them to the presidium or central committee for final approval.

There is also some evidence which suggests to us that certain types of decisions are actually made at meetings of the Council or circulated in private channels in the name of the Council. Thus, a reference in

[redacted] to "requirements" of the Main Military Council to be "strictly fulfilled" by commanders and party organizations in the armed forces indicates that the Council performs some policy functions and issues directives in the military sphere. The "requirements" are impossible to define because of a lack of evidence. We have not turned up any references to specific documents issued in the name of the Higher Military Council.\*

\*There is evidence of issuances in the name of lower-level military councils, but these institutions are a species quite different from the unique Higher Military Council.

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[ ] description of the Higher Military Council as an "operational" group also imputes to it executive authority. Thus, the Council may be charged with the task of determining the ways in which certain basic policies--decided on at a higher level either by Khrushchev personally, by the presidium inner sanctum or by other informal "teams"--ought to be carried out. It is probably in this sense that the Council plays a formal role in the policy-making process. For it is doubtful that any of the above-mentioned higher authorities would wish to share their formal decision-making powers with the military and scientific elite, who have been traditionally regarded as primarily technicians and instruments of the civilian party leadership. (This is not to underestimate the considerable indirect or informal role which the military plays in policy formulation. More on this shortly.)

#### Advisory Role

Khrushchev, as almost all of the available data implies, convokes meetings of the Council primarily in order to seek out the advice of the specialists on problems of national importance. In describing the deliberations of the Council, [ ] related that Khrushchev chairs the meeting, dominates it entirely, and questions its members directly, without consulting Malinovsky. [ ] Khrushchev, acting in the capacity of Commander-in-Chief, replaces Malinovsky as the effective head of the military establishment in this Council.

Open publications do not mention the Higher Military Council by name, and the rare public accounts of the military decision-making process provide us with few insights into the various factors which shape the final choice. Rather, the sporadic references to policy-making in the public media intentionally obfuscate the actual decision-making machinery by surrounding it in vague references to the "collectivity" of party leadership. (Khrushchev himself at a Moscow ceremony on 17 April this year stated

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that "not everything depends on me; I work in a collective.") Authoritative military references mention only the "official" decision-making bodies in the party, and stop short (as might be expected) of mentioning Khrushchev's actual decision-making machinery.

Most notable among the attempts to intentionally obscure the Soviet policy process under Khrushchev are two recent articles by Marshal Malinovsky (in RED STAR) and Marshal Grechko (in IZVESTIYA) that appeared on the occasion of Khrushchev's seventieth birthday in April 1964. Both Marshals portrayed the dominance of Khrushchev and the party (central committee and presidium), and portrayed the professional military as the group which advises and provides other forms of support in the policy-making process. In a rare description of "conferences" (soveshchanyy) of presidium members and leading military officers, Marshal Grechko seemed to be writing about meetings of the Higher Military Council:

In the past ten years all these basic changes in the structure of our armed forces have taken place under the leadership of the Leninist Central Committee of our Party and of N.S. Khrushchev personally. In these years, at the initiative of N.S. Khrushchev, the Presidium of the CPSU Central Committee has held a series of conferences with the participation of leading military figures at which the most important problems relating to the development of each type of armed force and branch of troops have been carefully studied. N.S. Khrushchev has most actively participated in the work of these conferences and given proof of a profound and specific knowledge of military matters. He has been the initiator of many valuable undertakings which have considerably strengthened the defense capability of our state. It was at his proposal that the strategic rocket troops were created, which now form the backbone of the military power of the Soviet Union and of the entire socialist camp. (Our emphasis.)

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Grechko's reference to the "ten year" length of the conferences with the "presidium" seems to be calculated to fit the party theme of collectivity. He does not, of course, provide his readers with the dates that Khrushchev was able (1) to dominate the "conferences" and thus maintain direct personal control over the military establishment, and subsequently (2) to deprive his associates in the ruling presidium from acquiring enough military authority to challenge his. Malinovsky's brief reference to decision making is even less specific than Grechko's. In the context of praising Khrushchev's leadership and scoring the "lifeless canons and dogmas widespread under Stalin," Malinovsky wrote that

before deciding on any problem and adopting a practical decision on it, members of the party Central Committee, members of the CPSU Central Committee Presidium, make a detailed study of the state of affairs in the Army and Navy, of the urgent problems in consolidating the country's defense capacity, of the urgent problems of military development, and consult leading military cadres. After this a concrete decision is reached.

While redundant, Malinovsky's last sentence emphasizes his point that military cadres are consulted on any problem before a "concrete decision" is reached. PRAVDA's version of Malinovsky's article and a 17 April Moscow domestic service broadcast on the article deleted this sentence, as if to play down the policy-maker's dependence on the military. (PRAVDA, for reasons unknown to us, also deleted Malinovsky's reference to Khrushchev as "Supreme High Commander," and referred to Khrushchev simply as "comrade.")

#### The Military Influence

This brings us to a consideration of the important indirect or informal role which the military plays in the

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formulation of policy in the USSR. We frequently see references in our intelligence publications to the success or failure of the Soviet military in checking this or that policy which Khrushchev has publicly championed. But we seldom, if ever, see an explanation of how the military manage to make their influence on policy felt. Clearly, the question is not an easy one, especially in view of the facts that no professional military man has sat in the party presidium since 1957, and the military representation in the party central committee constitutes less than ten percent of the total membership of that body.

The answer which we offer for consideration is that the Higher Military Council is the military's principal forum for applying pressure on the supreme leadership to act on policy. The military chieftains come to meetings of the Council as advisors. But the line between "advice" and special pleading or lobbying is slight and easily transgressed. In the meetings of the Council, the military are afforded direct access to Khrushchev and other key presidium members and discuss with them the most urgent defense-related problems of the day. Here the military chiefs have an opportunity, provided by the highest level forum to which they have access, to bring their viewpoints directly to bear on policy makers at an early stage in the decision-making process.\* While not specifically mentioning the Higher Military Council as the "lobbying" forum, Khrushchev himself (at a luncheon in New York as reported by TASS on 27 September 1960) commented on the influence of the military and weapon specialists on determining policy:

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\*The force component military councils, which we discuss later, might provide a specialized alternative forum for the branch commanders to influence, at an early stage in policy formulation, individual central committee members who reportedly head secret military sections within the CC apparatus.

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/The U.S. President/ told me that he is often asked by the military for money to manufacture this new type of weapons or another. They told him that the Russians would outstrip them in armaments unless he gave the money. The President asked me how this was done in our country. I replied that approximately the same thing happens. Military men and scientists approach the government and ask for money to manufacture new rockets. We give them money. Six months later the same men come again and say: We have designed better rockets, give us money for these rockets. We tell them: But recently we allocated funds for new rockets. And they reply: Now we have designed still better rockets, give us money, otherwise the Americans will outstrip us. So we have to allocate money again.

Another example of the influence of the professional military, [ ] was their role in the unilateral decision to resume nuclear weapons testing in 1961 after a moratorium of several years. According to [ ] the matter was discussed at a meeting of the Higher Military Council and the decision emanated from that discussion. The military, it was reported, exerted pressure on Khrushchev in that meeting to resume testing in 1961, by arguing convincingly that "they could not be fully prepared for war without testing in order to know how delivery vehicles would perform with nuclear warheads."

#### Khrushchev's Use of Professional Military Advice

Khrushchev (and his close advisors in the presidium) are, of course, not bound to act on the advice tendered by members of the Higher Military Council. Khrushchev has in the past acted contrary to the judgment of various members of the professional military leaders whose advice he had sought.

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A classic case in point was the unilateral troop-cut plan announced by Khrushchev in his Supreme Soviet speech on 14 January 1960. Khrushchev declared, with respect to the decision taken to reduce Soviet forces by one-third, that

We have studied this question in detail from every angle, consulted with the military and the general staff, and unhesitatingly reply: Our defense will be fully sufficient, and we have realistically taken everything into account. (Our emphasis.)

Khrushchev implied that the opinion given by the "military and the general staff" was one of support for the measure. But it has since been revealed that the second and third-ranking military leaders--the Chief of the Warsaw Pact forces and the Chief of the General Staff--had opposed Khrushchev's scheme. [redacted] confirming our own inference, reported that during the time of decision on the troop cut issue, Marshal Sokolovsky, then the Chief of the General Staff, protested to Khrushchev that, as a result of Khrushchev's budgetary cuts, he could not maintain the Soviet forces at the level which would be necessary to defeat the great numbers available to the enemy.) Overriding the opposition of Marshals Sokolovsky and Konev (then Warsaw Pact chief), Khrushchev pushed his troop cut program through and replaced the recalcitrant officers with some he thought to be more amenable in the top army posts.\*

\*Other senior military advisors also were opposed to the troop-cut plan but were evidently not as adamant as Konev and Sokolovsky. For example, [redacted] recently recalled that "when Marshal Grechko ~~gave~~ voice his strong opposition to the partial demobilization plans several years ago, Khrushchev threw him out of the meeting and Grechko went on an extended leave. Grechko was subsequently restored to grace, of course."

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### The Lower Military Councils

There are, of course, other means used by the military to express their viewpoints, the most notable being the large body of doctrinal writings, [redacted]

[redacted] And there is evidence suggesting that there may be forums other than the Higher Military Council used by the military to convey their views directly to high-level policy makers.

Other such advisory centers may be found in the military councils on the levels of the major field commands and force component headquarters.

Command Level Military Councils include those at the group of forces, military district, army, PVO district, fleet and flotilla level. They generally consist of at least three formal members: (1) the commander (or commander-in-chief) of the command, (2) his deputy or staff chief, and (3) the chief of the Main Political Administration (the top political officer in the military subdivision.) Members have reportedly included other senior officers of the military subdivision, assistants to the MPA chief, and, significantly, leading representatives of local party organs.\* In addition to professional military and party members, civilians engaged

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\*A 20 November 1963 Soviet military pamphlet entitled "Political Organs and Party Organizations of the Soviet Army and Navy," by Col. Gen. Kalashnik, states that "it is known that all first secretaries of central committees of Communist parties in union republics, first secretaries of kray committees, and many first secretaries of oblast party committees are members of military councils of military districts, fleets, and PVO districts." The SMALL SOVIET ENCYCLOPEDIA (1958), in discussing the military council on district, fleet and army level, states that "the council carries out its work in close contact with the local party organization."

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in essential military support activities in the locale have been reported as having attended meetings of military district councils.

The command military councils have powerful administrative responsibilities in addition to serving as consultative organs for the commander. According to a Soviet Defense Ministry book, FOUNDATIONS OF SOVIET MILITARY LAW (1962), military councils "possess the right guaranteed by law to examine and decide all important matters in troop life and activities." (Our emphasis.) The range of decision-making powers is broadly described in Soviet military articles as including "military and political preparation, administrative and mobilizational work and training of troops." Decisions at this level--which appear to fall into the routine day-to-day category, in contrast to the Higher Military Council's broader scope--are reportedly subject to a majority vote by the members of the command level military councils. According to a pamphlet by Larkov and Filippov, entitled "One-Man Command in the Soviet Armed Forces and Methods of Further Consolidation" (Moscow 1960),

the resolutions of military councils are passed by a majority vote after discussion of each question on the basis of business-like criticism and are brought into effect by order of the commander, (commander-in-chief).

Thus the voting right represents a significant check by the party on the local commander's freedom of maneuver.\*

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\*That the military councils continue to act as a limitation on the commander's freedom of maneuver is made clear in a 5 June 1964 RED STAR article by General Kurochkin. Evincing sensitivity on this point, Kurochkin attempts to rebut the views he says he occasionally finds "in our military-political literature...that in the Soviet Armed Forces there is no 'full' one-man command, since there are collective leading organs, the military councils." Kurochkin makes the weak argument that military councils do not annul the principle of one-man command since (footnote continued on page 16)

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The command-level military councils, as indicated in open press items, are subordinated to both the Defense Ministry and the central committee. They are under the Defense Ministry in that (1) the chairman of the local military council, the commander, is subordinate to the Defense Minister, and (2) the military council's resolutions are executed by the order of the commander. At the same time, the military councils are responsible to the party's central committee in that the Main Political Administration (an independent central committee department) places leading officials on the councils as voting members.

Force Component Military Councils appeared for the first time in the military press within a year after the fall of Zhukov. Since then, unfortunately, only a small amount of information regarding membership and functions of the five Military Councils has been uncovered from

The composition of the five councils at this level has not been revealed in available material. But if the composition of force component councils consistently follows the Navy's pattern (and the announced personnel in the Military Councils of the Air Defense and Strategic Rocket Forces lends support to this possibility), the membership would consist of (1) the Commanders-in-Chief of the force components, who head their respective Councils (Strategic Rocket Forces, Krylov; Navy, Gorshkov; Air Defense Forces, Sudets; Army Air Force, Vershinin; Ground Forces, Chuykov); (2) their deputies and staff chiefs; and (3) high-ranking Main Political Administration officers. (Deputy Chiefs of the MPA are known to be members of the Navy and Air Defense Councils.)

(footnote continued from page 15)

(1) the discussion of major problems in the councils "only helps the commander to avoid errors and to feel more convinced of the correctness of the decision made," and (2) the decisions of the military council are put into practice by the commander.

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The functions of the force component councils, as reflected in the military press, seem to parallel the duties of the command level military councils (discussed above). And the membership of the two types of councils appears to follow the same pattern (i.e., the commander, his staff chief, and a high-ranking MPA officer). But we do not know how rigidly this parallel is followed. For example, we know that leading local party representatives are members of the command level military councils, but we do not know whether senior central committee members are represented in force component military councils. And we do not know whether the members of force component councils have voting rights similar to the majority-vote principle of the command level military councils.

#### The Council and the U.S. National Security Council

Although it is a unique institution in Soviet society, the Higher Military Council, to the degree that its advisory functions are known to us, seems to bear some resemblance to the US National Security Council. In both cases, the chief of state has ultimate decision-making authority on strategic military issues. And in both cases, the duties of the two Councils are to assist the chief of state in the determination of and preparation for national security matters. A comparison of the "officially" defined general tasks of the two councils also shows a certain similarity:

##### National Security Council

"The duties of the Council are to assess and appraise the objectives, commitments, and risks of the United States in relation to its actual and potential military power, in the interest of national security, for the purpose of making recommendations to the President,

##### USSR Military Council

"A permanent, or temporarily convoked, consultative organ attached to the supreme state authority for the consideration of important problems concerning the preparation for and waging of war and military measures." (Short Dictionary of Operational,

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and to consider policies on matters of common interest to the departments and agencies of the Government concerned with the national security, and to make recommendations to the President." (Activities of the National Security Council, United States Government Organization Manual 1963-64, pp. 56-57)

Tactical and General Military Terms, Military Publishing House of the Ministry of Defense USSR, 1958, p. 70.)

While the advisory functions are apparently somewhat similar, the parallel breaks down regarding the current usage and composition of the two institutions. Regarding usage, the NSC which met somewhat regularly in the 1950's is, as a result of different styles of leadership, only occasionally called together today. Khrushchev, while using the Higher Military Council as an advisory body, may not rely upon it for consultation concerning a sensitive political-military matter (e.g., during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, Khrushchev reportedly relied upon a few experienced presidium members\*--not on a formal consultative body--for related advice). Regarding composition, the civilian U.S. Secretary of Defense (an NSC member) appears to wield more decision-making power than his Soviet counterpart, the professional military Defense Minister. In addition we have found no Higher Military Council link with the Soviet Foreign Ministry (which seems to play a minor policy-making role), and thus a comparison with the U.S. Secretary of State (an NSC member) cannot be drawn.

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\*The participation of the presidium and other high-level party, state and military individuals in military policy formulation will be the subject of our second study on decision making.

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While the Higher Military Council bears some comparison with the National Security Council, we feel that the former must be examined within the Soviet system in order to draw its present-day mission into sharper focus. Thus we have searched out the highlights of the council system over the last thirty years and present our findings in the following part in an attempt to increase our understanding of the processes of military consultation and policy recommendation in the Soviet Union.

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## PART TWO: THE EVOLUTION OF THE COUNCIL

In this portion of the study, we shall try to place the Higher Military Council in historical perspective. The military council system, in brief outline, has evolved in the following way:

(1) a Military Council under the Defense Commissar was formed in 1934 as a high-level consultative organ and was subsequently abolished, presumably between the end of 1937 and the beginning of World War II;

(2) in 1937, subordinate military councils were created and given administrative functions (a role directly related to the military purge) as well as advisory roles;

(3) in 1938, Stalin established two Main Military Councils ("Glavnyy Voyenny Sovet") to run the Army and Navy;

(4) the powers of the two Main Military Councils were assumed by the State Defense Committee and Stavka during World War II, and lower-level military councils were subordinated to the Stavka;

(5) shortly after the war, a single Main Military Council (presumably combining the role of the two 1938 Main Military Councils) and a Military Council under the Defense Minister (somewhat similar to that formed in 1934) were recreated;

(6) after the 1950 military reorganization, references to Stalin's postwar Main Military Council disappeared from view and the command-level military councils apparently were stripped of their administrative duties;

(7) in the 1953-1957 "collective party leadership" period, the high-level military council was ignored and the work of lower level military councils was (according to anti-Zhukov articles) curtailed;

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(8) finally, with the fall of Zhukov and the consolidation of supreme power by Khrushchev, lower-level military councils were revitalized with administrative and consultative tasks; force component military councils were introduced; and a Higher Military Council was formed to accommodate Khrushchev's style of rule.

### 1934: The Origin of the Military Council As A Consultative Body

The origins of the Higher Military Council may be traced back to a June 1934 decree of the party's central executive committee which formally abolished the Revolutionary Military Council (Revvoensovet) and established the more centralized People's Commissariat of Defense.\* The decree also set up a "Military Council" under the new People's Commissariat of Defense, in the capacity of a "consultative organ." This organ, we think, was a prototype of the present "Higher Military Council."

Unlike the present Higher Military Council, however, (1) the earlier version was subordinated to the Commissariat of Defense, of which it was an organic part; and (2) the membership of the earlier version was limited to

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\*The Revvoensovet (RVS) was the governing body of the Military Commissariat from the early days of the Civil War, and the RVS possessed ultimate executive and administrative control over the Soviet armed forces. The RVS as the "nerve center" of the command was composed of military men acceptable to the central committee and was directly subordinate to this body. The 1934 reorganization which abolished the RVS was aimed, first, at strengthening Stalin's control over the Soviet military establishment, and, second, at promoting the more efficient control of the military over the operational, administrative and technical aspects of the questions with which they were involved. (See Erickson's THE SOVIET HIGH COMMAND, London, 1962, Chapter Seven).

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the official head of the military establishment, the Commissar of Defense, and his deputies.\* Thus, the Military Council of the late 'thirties met and worked under the command of Voroshilov (the People's Commissar for Defense); appointments to the Council were made by the Sovnarkom (Council of People's Commissars) on Voroshilov's recommendation; and the Council's decisions and recommendations were put into effect by Voroshilov who reported directly to Stalin.

1937-1938: The Military Purge and Stalin's Assumption of Direct Control of the Military Council

While Voroshilov's 1934 Military Council was composed exclusively of military personnel (around 80 members), senior party officials apparently had direct access to the minutes of the sessions. And when party officials occasionally attended meetings of the Council, they dominated it.

The Council was virtually decimated by the military purge of 1937-1938. From 1 to 4 June of 1937, an extraordinary session of the Council was held in which the head of the NKVD, Yezhov, submitted a report on an alleged "counter-revolutionary and treasonable organization" in the Red Army. Within 18 months of Yezhov's announcement, 75 of the 80 members of the Council were purged, according to Soviet sources. As a result of the purge, the role of the Military Council was gradually decreased and it was abolished, evidently late in 1938 or not long afterwards.

In the meantime, Stalin made two principal moves with the aim of tightening policial controls over the army, at the expense of the authority and prestige of

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\*SOVETSKOE ADMINISTRATIVNOE PRAVO, Moscow, 1950. p. 239.

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the professional officer corps. Firstly, in May 1937, subordinate military councils, composed of a commander and two other members, were introduced into the military districts, fleets and armies. In each of these commands, the new military council, according to the book MILITARY STRATEGY, was made the "highest organ of administration." It had "complete responsibility" both for the morale-political condition of the troops and for their "constant combat and mobilization preparedness." The fact that a political commissar was made a member of each council gave him the power to intervene in the control and administration of the major operational commands. Thus, on the major command level, Stalin was able to annul the principle of unity of command that had been in force since 1924 in the spheres of combat, supply and administration. Later in 1937, Stalin formally abolished the one-man command system and restored the equality of the commissars with commanding personnel on all levels in the armed forces. Secondly, in 1938, Stalin set up his own small, advisory groups of party and military men loyal to himself, and nominally responsible to the party central committee, to supervise the running of the Red Army and Navy. These groups were officially called "the Main Military Council of the Red Army...and the Main Military Council of the Navy." (LARGE SOVIET ENCYCLOPEDIA, November 1951, p. 486). In terms of their stature, authority, and functions, these councils more closely resembled the present-day Higher Military Council than did the Military Council which had been set up under the Defense Commissar in 1934.

The Army's Main Military Council consisted on a staff of eleven members; Voroshilov was Chairman of the group, which included Stalin himself, Blyukher, Budenny, Mekhlis, Shaposhnikov, and Shchadenko. The Army's Main Military Council bore some similarity to the Stavka of the Supreme High Command of World War II, particularly in its practice of sending members to military "front." (A case in point is Blyukher's command in the Lake Khasan operations of July-August 1938). Longer-range war planning, probably with a high degree of coordination with the Defense Committee (Komitet Oborony) of the politburo,

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was also an activity of the Main Military Councils in the period preceding World War II.

The Navy's Main Military Council was under the chairmanship of politburo member Zhdanov--but in reality, both councils were under the control of Stalin to whom Zhdanov and Voroshilov reported. The Main Military Councils took over all the administrative functions of the debilitated Military Council (also under Voroshilov) which is said to have continued to function as a consultative organ until it was eventually abolished. (LARGE SOVIET ENCYCLOPEIDA, November, 1951, p. 486)

The second edition of MILITARY STRATEGY expanded on the original in relating that "the Main Military Councils examined the basic problems of the structure of the Army and Navy, and directed all of their activity into the thorough preparation of the Army and Navy for the impending war." As an example, both versions of the book told of an April 1940 meeting of the Army's Main Military Council in which the "lessons of the war with Finland" were discussed and a decree introduced on reorganizing "many administrations of the People's Commissariat for Defense." (one of the important administrative changes specifically mentioned involved the reorganization of the Soviet air defense directorate into a main directorate.)

It may be of interest to note that Soviet historical accounts of the failure of Soviet defense policy on the eve of World War II blame Stalin personally (and to a much lesser degree Marshals Timoshenko and Zhukov), but nowhere to our knowledge criticize the military council system. In the current historical fare, Stalin is accused of having ignored the principles of collective leadership--i.e., by implication, he ignored his military advisors--

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and of having drawn the wrong conclusions for the strategic preparation of the country.\*

1941: Role of Military Councils Assumed by State Defense Committee and Stavka During World War II

The USSR was at war only a week or so when a radical reorganization of the military, the government, and the party was undertaken. On 30 June 1941, Stalin established the State Defense Committee (Gosudarstvennyy Komitet Oborony: GKO) as the "highest agency of command for the country and armed forces." In the GKO, government and party

\*The Commander-in-Chief of the Strategic Rocket Forces, Marshal Krylov, delivered such a commentary earlier this year: "It must be admitted that under the conditions of Stalin's personality cult, the potentialities of the country and its armed forces were not fully exploited for executing a crushing repulse to such a strong and dangerous enemy as the German fascist aggressors in 1941. Concentrating great power in his own hands and misusing the confidence of the party and people, Stalin unilaterally decided on the most important state problems and grossly ignored Lenin's principles of collective leadership. The reprisals against a great number of outstanding military leaders who were faithful and loyal commanders to the party constituted one of the most serious consequences of his activity. Before the outbreak of the war Stalin was familiar with data on the concentration and deployment of German fascist divisions on the Western borders of the USSR. But he considered this only a provocation. As a result, the country and the army found themselves in a difficult position in the initial period of the war. It was only the unflinching will of the party and the courage of the Soviet people which made it possible to survive that period, to effect a breakthrough, and to win victory." (IZVESTIYA interview, on the occasion of Armed Forces Day, 23 February 1964.)

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functions were fused.\* The GKO almost overnight became the center of administrative and operational command over governmental, military and administrative organs in the Soviet Union.\*\* Presided over by Stalin, the GKO consisted of five to eight politburo members, including originally, Molotov, Voroshilov, Malenkov, and Beria. Later, Mikoyan, Kaganovich, and Voznesensky joined the group, and in 1944 Bulganin replaced Voroshilov.

The individual members of the GKO were given direct responsibilities for the principal branches of the country's war materiel production--Molotov for tanks, Beria for armaments and munitions, Malenkov for aircraft, and Mikoyan for food and fuel. (Mikoyan is the only former State Defense Committee member still active in Soviet political life and, as we have already pointed out, he

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\*The fusion was also personified by Stalin, who, during the war, assumed the posts of leader of the party, head of the government, Chairman of the State Defense Committee, Chairman of the Stavka, People's Commissar of Defense and Supreme Commander-in-Chief.

\*\*The "possible" future wartime organization of the Soviet strategic leadership, according to both 1962 and 1963 editions of the Defense Ministry's book MILITARY STRATEGY, would be delegated the same powers the State Defense Committee held during World War II. This organization, a "higher agency of command" (vysshiy organ rukovodstva), would be under the leadership of the first secretary of the CPSU central committee and head of government, "to whom the functions of Supreme Commander-in-Chief of all the Armed Forces" may be assigned. Additionally, the Defense Ministry books suggest that the Warsaw Pact Political Consultative Committee would act as a high political organ for the coordination of the Satellite and Soviet forces. The leadership of joint operations would be supplied by the Soviet Supreme High Command, in which the supreme commands of the satellite armies would be represented.

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reportedly attends meetings of the present-day Higher Military Council.)

While the GKO was responsible for directing and coordinating the overall war effort, another agency, the headquarters or Stavka of the Supreme High Command, was charged with the day-to-day prosecution of the war and with developing the overall strategic plans for the military forces. Created by the GKO as a sort of joint chiefs of staff, the Stavka consisted of between twelve and fourteen top military officers who advised Stalin, chairman of the Stavka and the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. In addition to Zhukov, the effective military head of the Stavka during most of its existence, other chief members were Marshals Vasilevsky, Budenny, Timoshenko, Voronov, and Shaposhnikov. Directly subordinate to the Stavka was the General Staff (the Chief of which also sat on the Stavka) which acted as a source of planning and data on order of battle.

Unfortunately, we do not have information on the disposition of the two Main Military Councils during the war. We would deduce from the above accounts, however, that they were dissolved soon after the war began and their functions were taken over by the GKO and Stavka. In any case, we have never encountered references to the existence of these councils during the war. (The older Military Council in the Defense Commissariat had evidently been abolished by the time Hitler launched operation Barbarossa.)

On the other hand, the military councils of the districts, fleets and armies that had been set up in 1937, played a key role during the war. According to the LARGE SOVIET ENCYCLOPEDIA entry of 1951, they continued to maintain "complete military and administrative authority in the front or army zone of operations," although they were strictly subordinated to the Stavka. The military councils of fronts (the wartime equivalent of military districts) were headed by the military front commander and were manned by senior party personnel--the most celebrated of whom was Khrushchev--who insured tight political control over major operational commands throughout the

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war. (On lower-levels of command, the political control system underwent several changes. The political commissar system, which had been abolished after the Finnish debacle, was restored following the disastrous first days of the war with Germany, but again gave way to the system of one-man command when the military situation improved in October 1942.)

The methods of strategic command and control during the war and their relation to policy formulation have since become a politically charged issue within the Soviet Union, where historical writing is still made to serve the purposes of the current party leadership or to air the grievances of dissenters from current or proposed policies. Thus principal credit for the planning of the successful Stalingrad operation in the fall of 1942 has alternately passed from Stalin to the Stavka (notably Zhukov), to the front command--where Khrushchev served as a member of the military council. By our own account of the machinery of military policy formulation during the war, there seems to have evolved (after an initial period of desperate innovation) an efficient "Stavka-front" system, consisting of an exchange of combat intelligence between the fronts and Stalin's Stavka and the transmission of directives from the "Supreme High Command" to the field commanders. The Stavka/General Staff directives\* provided the general concept of operations determined the forces to be committed and concentrated in its execution, and set the date for commencing the operation. Front commanders enjoyed some latitude in applying their own specific requirements for the execution

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\*In making vital decisions, the Stavka apparently relied heavily on foreign intelligence sources as well as on the tactical information supplied from the Soviet fronts. See Erickson, *THE SOVIET HIGH COMMAND*, for an excellent description of the role of espionage nets on military policy making--specifically the vital decisions based on reports from Sorge in Japan, Rote Kapelle in Germany, and Rossler in Switzerland (pp. 637-639).

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of the Stavka order, but rigid adherence to the front directive was the keynote of operations at the army level and below. In addition to Stavka directives, individual members of the Supreme High Command were frequently sent to the area of operations (Zhukov to Stalingrad for an example), and front commanders and their representatives were frequently summoned to the Stavka.

1946: Establishment Of A Single Main Military Council

With the end of the war, Stalin abolished the State Defense Committee (September 1945) and the Stavka (in 1946). He also relinquished his own title of Supreme High Commander, according to official Soviet histories, but remained the official as well as actual head of the military establishment until March 1947, when he gave up the post of Minister of the Armed Forces to a political marshal, Bulganin.

Again, lamentably, we have hardly any information on the military advisory bodies in the early postwar period. One Soviet source, ADMINISTRATIVE LAW OF THE USSR (1946), states without elaboration:

To the central organs of the military administration belong: the Main Military Council [Glavnyy Voenyy Sovet], the Ministry of the Armed Forces of the USSR, and the Military Council--a consultative organ of the Minister of Armed Forces of the USSR.

While we have found no information stating that the two Main Military Councils formed in 1938 were ever formally abolished, we are led to conclude that a new single Main Military Council, combining the roles of those set up in 1938, was formed by Stalin in February 1946, when the Navy and Defense Commissariats were merged. (In March 1946, the unified defense commissariat was named the Ministry of the Armed Forces of the USSR.) The ADMINISTRATIVE LAW BOOK of 1946, while failing to supply information

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on the functions and membership of the new Main Military Council, revealed the supramilitary status of that organ by listing it before the Defense Ministry. (Our next explicit reference to the Main Military Council, some 15 years later in the July, 1961, [redacted])

[redacted] also placed the Council before the Defense Ministry in a hierarchical listing of administrative agencies.) The membership of the Military Council under the Ministry of Defense has not been discussed [redacted] but presumably it included at least the Defense Minister (who probably reported directly to Stalin), the deputy defense ministers, and representatives of the General Staff.

1950: Council System Stripped of Former Powers

The Main Military Council noted in 1946 was ignored in official Soviet publications following the February 1950 reorganization (in which the USSR Ministry of the Armed Forces was renamed "War Ministry of the USSR" and the control of the Naval Forces was concentrated in the "Ministry of the Navy of the USSR"). We have found no evidence to indicate that the 1950 reorganization of the Soviet military establishment into the two ministries involved the re-establishment of two Main Military Councils for the two military ministries (as in 1938). It is possible that the post-war Main Military Council was abolished at that time. Some twenty months after the 1950 reorganization of the defense establishment, the LARGE SOVIET ENCYCLOPEDIA ignored the Main Military Council but spoke of a "Military Council" which was similar to the post-war advisory organ under the Defense Minister:

The Military Council is a collegial, usually consultative, organ under the war Minister [who is the] commander of all Armed Forces of the state.

Stalin may not have felt compelled to make much use of his post-war Main Military Council in the first place. The Main Military Council, like so many of his formal

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organizations, may not have been abolished and may have continued to exist as a paper organization which seldom met. (In the early postwar period, for example, Stalin called only irregular meetings of the politburo.) And in view of the general stagnation in Soviet military doctrine in that period, it would appear that Stalin ruled over the armed forces with a heavy hand and a deaf ear to his generals and marshals until his death in 1953. (Marshal Grechko recently declared--in IZVESTIYA on 17 April 1964--that Stalin adopted incorrect positions on organizational problems while "remaining at the head of the armed forces after the war.")

In addition, the 1950 reorganization apparently stripped the command-level military councils of the powers which they had wielded during and immediately after the war. The change in power and status from the military council to the local commander is strikingly evident in a comparison of the 1946 Evtikhiev-Vlasov book, ADMINISTRATIVE LAW USSR with the 1950 Eutikhiev-Vlasov-Studeniken book, SOVIET ADMINISTRATIVE LAW:

1946 Administrative Law USSR

1950 Soviet Administrative Law\*

Status

"The military council of a military district (army, fleet) is the highest representative of military power in the district (army, fleet). It is subordinated directly to the Ministry of Armed Forces of the USSR. All military units and military institutions which are located on the territory of a district (front, army) are subordinated to the military council. It consists of the commander of the district troops (he is also the chairman) and two members."

"The commander of a military district (fleet, flotilla, group of forces) is the highest authority of all the troops, military institutions and military training establishments on the territory of a district (fleet, flotilla, group of forces) and is subordinated directly to the War Ministry of the USSR (Ministry of the Navy of the USSR)."

\*The 1950 work ignored the military council system altogether.

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Powers

"The military council has complete responsibility for the political-morale condition and constant battle and mobilization preparedness of the military institutions which are located in the district. It is entrusted with the leadership of combat political preparedness of the troops of a district (army, fleet); training and selection of cadres of command political and leading staffs of a district's units and institutions; the mobilization preparedness of the troops of a district, the communication routes and means of contact on the district's territory; the training of all personnel in the selfless spirit of dedication to the homeland and Soviet authority, in the merciless spirit of struggle with the people's enemies, with spies, saboteurs, wreckers. The district military council is charged with ensuring the units and institutions with all types of technical and material supplies, sanitary and veterinary provisions, defensive and nondefensive construction on the territory of a district. The military council of a district takes an active part in the work of civic organization regarding the strengthening of the rear areas and

"The commander of the troops of district (fleet, flotilla, group of forces) has complete responsibility for the political-morale condition and constant battle and mobilization preparedness of the military units and institutions which are located in the district. He is entrusted with the leadership of battle and political preparedness of the troops of a district, training and selection of cadres of district units and institutions; the mobilization preparedness of the troops of a district, the communication routes and means of contact on the territory of a district; the training of all personnel in the selfless spirit of dedication to the homeland and Soviet authority, in a merciless spirit of struggle with the people's enemies, with spies, saboteurs, wreckers. The commander of the troops of a district (fleet, flotilla, group of forces) is charged with ensuring the units and institutions all types of technical and material supplies, sanitary and veterinary provisions, defensive and nondefensive constructions on the territory of a

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fulfilling other work which is directed toward strengthening the defensive capabilities of the USSR." (p. 152)

district. He takes an active part in the work of civic organizations regarding the strengthening of the rear areas and in fulfilling other work which is directed toward strengthening the defensive capabilities of the USSR." (p. 240)

Stripped of their postwar status and powers, the command-level military councils nevertheless continued to exist after the 1950 reorganization. "In peacetime," the 1951 LARGE SOVIET ENCYCLOPEDIA's entry went, "in the Soviet Army the military council is preserved as a consultative organ under the district commanders."

#### 1953-1957: Diminished Role of Council System Continues

From the death of Stalin to the fall of Marshal Zhukov, the military council system was, as in earlier postwar days, rarely mentioned. The near silence regarding command-level military councils is probably most clearly explained by the 2 November 1957 CPSU CC resolution, and follow-up comment, which charged Zhukov with pursuing "a policy of curtailing the work of...military councils."

Soviet comment subsequent to the Zhukov indictment has suggested that during this period the lower-level military councils did not regain their wartime powers of "complete military and administrative authority," but rather continued to serve only as advisory bodies. A 1960 Defense Ministry pamphlet, "One-Man Command in the Soviet Armed Forces and Methods of Further Consolidation," after scoring Zhukov's alleged pursuit of military leadership as having been "void of checks and controls," stated:

...Our party has energetically rejected all attempts to eliminate military

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councils or to reduce their rule to consultative organs without any rights at all.

The membership of the command-level military councils at this time has not been made clear [redacted]. But on the basis of Soviet press articles in the post-Zhukov period, we would surmise that the composition of the councils was stacked in favor of the professional military. For not until after Zhukov's dismissal were Chiefs of the Political Directorates identified as members of Military Councils at the military-district and group-of-forces level.\* This new identification suggests that the top political officer in the area had not been a member of the military council during at least the latter part of the "collective leadership" period.

In the absence of Soviet references to any high-level military council during this period, the advisory and policy planning tasks appear to have fallen within the exclusive domain of the professional military chiefs and the General Staff. In support of this inference, some post-Zhukov press items indicate that during Zhukov's administration armed forces members were denied direct representation to the decision-makers. For example, Marshal Moskalenko wrote in an article in RED STAR on 3 November 1957 that as a result of Zhukov's "rude trampling of Leninist principles" of directing the armed forces, "the situation reached the point where Communists were actually not permitted to address the central committee of the party, to express their proposals and ideas."

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\*The first identification of a "member of the Military Council and Chief of the Political Directorate" occurred on 30 October 1957, when Lt. Gen. N. M. Aleksandrov of the Kiev Military District was so described. Since then this designation has been given to the top political officers in the other military districts.

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1957 - Present: Khrushchev Revitalizes Council System

Within a year after the fall of Zhukov, three significant developments (which we discussed in Part One of this study) were brought about in the military council system of the Soviet Union.\* The first involved Khrushchev's creation of the Higher Military Council, first defined in a 1958 military dictionary (cited earlier)

[redacted] The primary reasons for Khrushchev's creation of the Higher Military Council, we feel, were (1) his felt need to ensure his assumption of direct operational and administrative control over the entire Soviet military establishment, and (2) his desire to have a high-level consultative body on defense matters at his immediate disposal. An effect of this development, if not another aim, was to provide individual professional military leaders with a forum for direct access to the ultimate policy-makers.

Two other changes in the council system occurred at about the same time, and probably for the same purposes. One involved the creation of an unprecedented type of council--military councils at the force component level (ground forces, navy, anti-air defense, etc.)--which began to be mentioned in the press in 1958. Another change, made apparent directly after the fall of Zhukov, involved the revitalization of the major operational command level military councils which were given greater administrative powers in addition to their former consultative role.

\*The changes in 1957-58 in the council system may be legally based in a document sporadically cited in the Soviet press entitled "Regulations on Military Councils" or the "Statute on Military Councils" which was issued sometime between the November 1957 indictment of Zhukov and the end of 1958. The document, unfortunately, remains unpublished and currently unavailable.

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